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Peace Gardens

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Activity I: Developing Symbols for Your Peace Garden

Objectives: Students will:

- learn that images and objects can convey meaning;
- conceptualize symbols of peace, and describe how they connect the idea of peace to their symbols;
- plan to integrate their symbols in a garden/habitat setting;
- grasp the importance of good communication in promoting peace and conflict resolution;
- practice good communication skills.



Standards addressed: [click here](#)

Materials: White board, chalkboard, overhead projector, or flip chart for recording discussion points; examples of symbols (optional)

Central Concepts:

- **What is peace?** Students will define and communicate what peace means to them: ideas, feelings, images.
- **What is a symbol?** Students will learn that symbols are images or objects that represent a specific meaning.
- **What are good communication skills?** Students will practice good communication, respecting others while speaking *and* listening.

What Does Peace Mean to You?

Discussion Topic 1: Scope and Perspective

Question: What feelings, images, or words come to mind when you think about peace?

Question: What does peace look or feel like in your relationships with family members, friends, and strangers?

- Peace is an abstract concept which is difficult to define, yet you know it (and feel it) when you see it. Encouraging students to describe it -- *How does it look or feel?* -- is a good way to help them create their own definitions.
- Ask students to describe peace in the context of personal relations, such as with family or friends, as well as from the broader, less personal contexts, such as world peace.
- Ask them to consider the differences in their responses, if any. How do the responses from the personal perspective differ from the impersonal? What are the benefits or ramifications of peace in their personal context? In the broader context? What are the difficulties with each? Which would be easier to attain? Why?

Discussion Topic 2: Importance of communication

Question: What sorts of actions and behaviors lead to conflict? What would counteract or help avoid each of these actions or behaviors?

- Misunderstandings fuel many conflicts, and effective communication can help heal or avoid conflict. Ask students to share their thoughts about the role of communication in fostering peaceful relations.
- Ask for examples of positive communication in the personal context, and in the broader context, such as between nations or cultures. What are the difficulties with each? Which would be easier? Why?

Bringing It Back to the Garden: Conceptualizing Peace Symbols

Use the discussion of peace and symbolism to lead students into a discussion of symbols that will be used to represent peace in their school garden. In the **Task** part of this activity, challenge students to: present ideas clearly; and evaluate and critique each other's ideas in a positive way.

Discussion Topic 1: Concept and examples of symbols

Question: What is a symbol?

- A symbol is an object or images that stands for something or communicates a message. Ask students to give their own definitions of the word and discuss these within the group. Ask them to offer examples, and to share what each stands for or communicates.

Examples:

- The American flag has 13 stripes to symbolize the original 13 states, and 50 stars for the current number of states.
- Mr. Yuk is a symbol that tells you there's something inside that will make you sick if you play with it or swallow it.
- In the garden sunflowers are symbols of peace. What qualities or traits do sunflowers have that make you think of peace? (They seem warm and friendly; they grow well in groups.) [Click here](#) for more examples of plants as peace symbols.

Discussion Topic 2: Creating symbols to convey ideas, images, and feelings.

Question: What kinds of objects, plants, gardens, or other activities could be included in the garden to symbolize peace?

- Review the responses recorded from the previous discussion of peace. Remind students that these symbols need to communicate ideas, images, and feelings about peace. Record their ideas. If students need prompting, suggest an element or two [from the sidebar above](#).

Examples:

- Roses are often an element of peace gardens. The rose is the national flower of the United States; most people recognizes roses when they see them; there is a rose variety named 'Peace'. (Funding for peace gardens is available via NGA's [Remember Me Rose School Garden Award](#).)
- White is a color often associated with peace. This can be represented in a garden through the use of white flowers and plants with white/green variegated foliage.
- If your discussion yielded the idea that "peace" is "being quiet and still," what might symbolize that? (A space designated for quiet observation or contemplation; a large stone that sits unmoved through all kinds of weather.)
- Some people find being near water peaceful. A pond, waterfall, or fountain can symbolize peace for them. An idea like "acceptance" can be symbolized by growing flowers of many different colors to represent the diversity of human cultures, or a mural or flag depicting people in a circle holding hands.

Task: In groups or individually, using written descriptions and/or drawings, ask students to:

- Describe details of some of the symbols suggested for use in their peace garden;
- Explore what form these symbols might take (e.g., paint the symbol on a flag or sign; make a cement stepping stone with the symbol molded into it; create a mural or mosaic illustrating a concept).
- Share their ideas and choose their favorites for inclusion in the garden.

Ask students to:

- consolidate like ideas from the discussion period into groups;
- review what they like about each one;
- discuss feasibility of each for their garden site/situation (e.g., cost, logistics, space);
- vote to determine which to create and install in their garden.

Creating Symbols for Your Peace Garden

On your own, or with the art teacher at your school, integrate the creation of the various symbols into

Ideas for design elements:

Plants
Sculpture
Murals
Flags/banners/signs/plaques
Benches
Paths
Water features
Designated spaces (performance/gathering space; quiet space)

garden projects. (The Center for Inquiry in Indianapolis partnered with local arts organizations to meld peace with fine arts education in their garden -- [read about their project here.](#))

Extensions

Language Arts:

- Writing to explain: For example, ask students to write a story or a statement about their peace garden that formally explains why the group chose these objects or images to symbolize peace. This might be used in a proposal to school administrators, or for use in a funding proposal.
- Writing from a personal perspective: Ask students to write a personal response to the peace garden project. What does it mean to them?

Group activities:

- Create signage or a written interpretive guide to the garden explaining the meaning or intended use of different areas and symbols.
- Brainstorm peace garden outreach to the community. Prompts: How can we share symbols of peace at the school indoors, or at home? How can we share peace with the neighborhood/community?
- Host ceremonies in your peace garden. A ceremony is a ritual that conveys a specific meaning -- essentially a symbol in action. Examples: Have a dedication ceremony to introduce your peace garden and your peaceful intentions in a formal way to other classes, parents, and the community; create a remembrance space in the garden to honor teachers or students who have died; use the garden as a site for official school functions and ceremonies.

Plants of Peace

The olive branch is a well-known symbol of peace, and is often paired with a dove. There are other plants that symbolize peace to different cultures. Here's a sampler:

Plant	Symbol
rhododendron	In Russia, the blossoms signify peace, health, and purity
mistletoe	In Scandinavia, associated with Frigga, the goddess of love
white pine tree	For the Native American Haudenosaunee, or Six Nations Peoples, the five needles joined together indicate unity
Listed below are plants have named or designated as symbols of peace in more recent history:	
Peace Rose	A rose variety introduced in 1945 to commemorate the end of World War II.
Sunflowers	Became a symbol of freedom from the threat of nuclear weapons during the 1990s. Sunflowers are warm and welcoming; grow in friendly crowds; and produce nutritious seeds for people and wildlife.

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